

Mitchell Upholds Hoover's Right 'To Talk, Like Anybody Else'

By FRED P. GRAHAM

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 —

Attorney General John N. Mitchell said today that he found nothing improper in certain statements made recently by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

At a news conference at the Justice Department, Mr. Mitchell was repeatedly asked about published comments in which the 75-year-old bureau chief called former Attorney General Ramsey Clark a jellyfish, accused two imprisoned Roman Catholic priests of plotting to kidnap a White House aide, and said that Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans could not shoot straight but were dangerous with knives.

"Until he gets to the point, which he has not arrived at and I do not expect him to get to, where he is doing something that is improper within the confines of this department, he has a right to talk, just like anybody else," Mr. Mitchell said.

Denies Rule Is Violated

He said that Mr. Hoover's charges against the Rev. Daniel Berrigan and his brother, the Rev. Philip F. Berrigan, did not violate a Justice Department rule against comment on pending investigations. Mr. Mitchell explained that this rule applied with greater force to attorneys than to the F.B.I.

Mr. Hoover was recently quoted in Time magazine as saying that there was no concern that Puerto Ricans or Mexicans would shoot the President "because they don't shoot very straight, but if they come at you with a knife, beware."

Mr. Mitchell declared that, in the context of Mr. Hoover's remarks, it could be seen that he was not "castigating or defaming any particular race, creed or anybody else."

"From where I sit, he's doing a mighty fine job," Mr. Mitchell concluded.



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Attorney General John N. Mitchell at news session.